1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

535 by a few men with kettle-drums and more with clanging brass gongs; to this babel of sound must be added the clatter of the innumerable iron neck-rings and the bracelets of the girls, and the clangour of the great bunches of bells on the buttocks of the male dancers. The whole scene is lit up by blazing torches and log fires.

535 831 Often a slight element of obscenity is introduced by one or two men dressed as tiger-men with large imitation *membra virilia* which they brandish at each other and at the women, girls and youths, rushing ludicrously here, there, and everywhere, and provoking such laughter that often the dancers have to break off their singing to join in.

535 868 There is no formal dancing teaching. Boys are allowed to join in the dances when they are about six, and girls when nine or ten. They learn simply by imitating their elders.

535 574 Men of all ages, married and unmarried, youths, boys, young wives and girls join in the Bison-horn Maria dances. There appears to be no time of year at which they are forbidden to dance, though naturally the spring and the summer, when they are freest from field-work, see most of their dancing. If at this time of year you invite villagers to dance at your camp, the throb of the drums attracts more and more men and girls from surrounding villages; for the tradition is that no invitation is needed, and that open house should be kept at a wedding or any other occasion when there will be dancing.

2. Bison-horn Maria

535 292 There is no mixing of men and girls as in the Abujhmar hills. The girls, in their ordinary finery of beads and iron and brass neck-rings, and wearing their head snoods and fillets of polished brass, have no special dancing apparatus except the *tirdudi* dancing-sticks ornamented with iron bells which they hold upright in their right hands, clashing the bells in unison by striking the ground with the butts of the sticks on their left front as they bring their left foot across in front of their right; each girl rests her left arm on the back of the left shoulder of the girl on her left. They gyrate to the right, like the Hill Marias, but the Bison-horn women have a far more rapid step; the right foot is moved to the right and slightly to the rear, and the left foot is then brought across the right leg to the right front, while the ground is struck with the butts of the jingling dancing-sticks. The girls in this way dance fast around the outside of the dancing men, sometimes singing as they go; but the unceasing throb of the men's great drums drowns their song.

535 The women's step never varies, whatever the dance; but the men have many different dances and steps, and can improvise a dance on practically any theme, such as asking for pork or *landa*. Their *pen-karsila* or Koqsar dance is a very fast, side-stepping

1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
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Bison Horn Maria

involve considerable physical exertion and have proved excellent material for the physical training of the boys in the State schools; at the Muria *gotul* dormitories these games often take the place of dancing and singing. But the only Hill Maria villages which have anything of the kind appear to be those of the Padalibhum and Tapalibhum *parganas* which are gradually adopting the dormitory organization of their Muria neighbours; and some Bison-horn villages on the borders of the Jagdalpur Muria country are beginning to copy the Murias and Bhattras. Early to bed is the rule for old and young in Maria villages, and the child from the beginning learns to copy his father's activities; his playthings soon become small bows and arrows, fishing-rods and snares, skill in the use of which will make him an asset to the community. Stilt-walking in the early monsoon, occasional use of bull-roarers and bamboo drums, crude ornamentation of the walls of houses or the carving of ornamental combs and beadwork seem to be the only other recreations of Hill Maria youth.

F. *Reckoning Time*

The Hill Maria names for the months have already been given (page 129), and it has been said that in general the Bison-horn Marias know and use the local Hindu names. They call a month *lawj*, the word used for the moon; but all, even Bison-horn Marias, have to think hard before they can tell you what month it is, and there may be a certain amount of argument on the point. Throughout Bastar there is something of this uncertainty; the local Hindu months are named after festivals such as Goncha, Dasehra and Diwali; and the Bastaria, even if he adopts these, does not like to observe them on the same date in every village, because that would deprive him of the chance of taking part in the celebrations at the surrounding villages.

Though the Bison-horn Maria knows the Hindu names for the days of the week, and uses them in his conversation, the Hill Maria does not. If word comes to a Hill Maria headman that in thirteen days' time he and his villagers have to go to the tahsil court, or to work on the annual road repairs, he will make a tally string with thirteen knots and undo one every day, leaving to keep the appointment on the morning of the last knot. These tally strings are also kept by those who attend markets at fairly regular intervals; and in a murder case, of which the villagers had decided to suppress or postpone informing the police because it was the harvest season, the wife of the murdered man, determined to get justice, had kept a tally string on which she tied a fresh knot every

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

CHAPTER TWENTY

DANCE AND SONG

I

DANCE and song, games, stories and riddles should not be regarded as mere recreation; in the Muria's eyes they are serious and important business. A ghotul's reputation largely depends on the excellence of its dancing; the motiari's ability to sing may make the difference between a successful or unsuccessful wedding. Even the games, many of them, serve an educational purpose. The younger boys and girls are carefully trained in the ghotul, and the others practise night after night, repeating the same steps and rhythms again and again till they get them right, before they set out on a dancing expedition. The complicated stick-dances need special training and practice, for once an expedition has started mistakes are regarded as ill-omened.

The first musician was Lingo himself, and the practice of music is not held, as so often in India, to be discreditable, but is honourably rooted in the history and mythology of the tribe. Many of the songs and dances have a religious purpose, and often begin with an invocation to Lingo and other gods. Before the Mandri dances at a wedding, worship should be performed before a pile of drums.

It is refreshing to go to Bastar from the reform-stricken [1] and barren districts of the Central Provinces. As you climb the Keskal Ghat the whole countryside bursts into song about you. The Muria have a short way with 'reformers', as I was fortunate enough to see at Telenga village on 26 March 1941. There was a marriage that day in the village, and the chelik and motiari from eleven villages came to attend it. But when they arrived they did not begin to dance as usual, but went out into the jungle for a consultation. They had seen among the wedding guests the sinister figure of Chainu, the headman of Maragaon. A month earlier this Chainu had attended a marriage at the house of Guma in his own village. Chelik and motiari had come as usual and danced till noon. Then according to custom they asked for liquor to offer to the drums and food for themselves. Chainu, who had been under a good deal of Hindu influence, refused to let them have either liquor for the drums or food for themselves, and declared that he would 'stop this dancing throughout the pargana'. The chelik and motiari left the marriage in protest and for a month the matter was the subject of heated discussion in their ghotul.

Now in Telenga the boys saw their chance. After a long discussion, they came back, a large and formidable crowd, and told the Pargana Manjhi (of Chalka) that they wanted a panchayat and that Chainu must be there. Near the marriage-booth the boys assembled in a great circle, and almost all the wedding guests joined to see what would happen. The unfortunate bride and bridegroom were left sitting in their places, entirely forgotten.

[1] It is very hard to understand the mentality of the 'reformers' who would deprive the aboriginal of his beautiful and innocent recreations, and would impose on him a 'Shiv-raj' (as it is often called) at which the great dancer Nataraja would have shuddered. It is interesting to compare the attitude of the American Negro towards the 'Spirituals' which have done as much as anything else to establish him throughout the world. At the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these were considered fit only for uneducated 'country niggers'. 'As late as 1909, Negro students at Howard University rebelled and refused to sing them. By the more progressive and aggressive elements in the race the Spirituals were frowned upon as a reminder of slavery and ignorance.'—N. I. White, *American Negro Folk-Songs* (Harvard, 1928), p. 3. Then suddenly, they became the fashion, and the Negroes found that nothing gave them more credit and prestige.